

Timely Placement of Unaccompanied Children into the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program

November 17, 2023

Dear Colleague Letter 24-04

Dear Colleague:

The Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program has had a significant increase in enrollments of children identified in the U.S. over the past several years. Between FY 2021 and FY 2022, there was a 45% increase in the number of children who entered the URM Program from ORR's Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program. The URM Program saw similar enrollment numbers in FY 2023 as FY 2022. Afghan humanitarian parolees represented the highest percentage of children who entered the URM Program from the UC Program in FY 2022 and there were considerable increases in referrals for victims of human trafficking and Haitian entrants in FY 2023. ORR expects URM enrollments from the UC Program to continue at a similar pace in FY 2024.

ORR needs your help with the timely placement of unaccompanied children in ORR custody who are eligible for the URM Program. Many of these children have been in shelter care facilities for months and should be moved into community-based foster homes in the URM Program. A prolonged stay in a congregate care setting may have detrimental effects on a child.

As ORR has made significant advancement to enhance shelter care, various studies have found that immigrant children with prolonged stays experienced developmental regression, poor psychological adjustment, high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and other behavioral problems. If a child meets all eligibility criteria for URM placement, they must transition out of ORR custody as soon as possible and be placed in the least restrictive setting that can meet their needs.

States that operate URM programs play a critical role in this transfer process. We recognize that URM providers want to thoroughly review all referral documents to offer the best possible placement match for a child. In FY 2023, the average number of days from the date ORR referred a case to its URM placement partners to the date a URM provider submitted a placement assurance was 21 days. Per [Section 2.3.1 of the ORR Guide to Eligibility, Placement, and Services for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors](#), states must ensure that there is a clear and efficient process in the state for making placement decisions for initial referrals from ORR. Additionally, states must develop and maintain written procedures that specifically address a timely and efficient review and response to an application referred via RADS by ORR. Due to the significant need to place children rapidly, states must also develop an alternative, streamlined process to review and respond to urgent referrals from ORR. Please work with your URM providers to ensure compliance with ORR policy on the referral review and placement assurance process. If your state needs additional administrative or staffing support to facilitate timely placements, please consider submitting a revised ORR-1 estimate. ORR appreciates your collaboration to reduce the number of days it takes to assure URM placement as this is in the best interest of the child.

In addition to a timely and efficient placement process, there is a continuous need for states to develop placement capacity. ORR recognizes the continued challenges the national URM network is facing with foster family recruitment, licensing, and retention. In accordance with [Section 2.5](#) of the URM Policy Guide, please work with your URM providers to develop and maintain the capacity to place children in a range of placements so they can be

discharged from the UC Program to the URM Program in a timely manner.

Please direct any questions about this Dear Colleague Letter to ORR URM Team Manager, Anne Mullooly, at Anne.Mullooly@acf.hhs.gov.

For states that do not operate a URM Program but are interested in opening a program in response to this call for additional placement capacity, please contact Anne Mullooly.

We appreciate all your work to support the timely placement of unaccompanied children into the URM Program.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Tota
Director, Refugee Program
Office of Refugee Resettlement